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There is a story told in business circles about a man who walked down to the beach one morning. As he approached the bubbly edge of the surf, he suddenly saw thousands and thousands of sea stars – “starfish” – that had washed on shore overnight. The tide was going out, and the entire colony was going die in the sun.



Day of Giving volunteers gave a day of their lives to make a difference at Hubert H. Bancroft Elementary School in Sacramento. Here, Rob Feickert tills the soil in preparation for the restoration of a native habitat. (Photo by Susan Laird)

He started to grab sea stars and throw them back into the ocean.

Another man came up to him and asked, “Why are you doing this? You can’t possibly save them all, even if you work all morning. There are too many to make a difference.”

“It makes a huge difference to this one,” the man replied as he tossed yet another sea star back into the ocean.

Prudential Realty celebrated its first annual Giving Day on March 6. The Giving Day was held in honor of Ed Krafchow, the company’s founder. Some 40 offices throughout Northern California and Northern Nevada each selected a “hands on” service project to benefit their local community and to make a difference.

The Sierra Oaks branch of Prudential California Realty selected third grade teacher Kristi Phillips’ educational/natural habitat preserve project at Hubert H. Bancroft Elementary School in Sacramento as the beneficiary for this inaugural event.

“This is part of a three-phase restoration of a quarter acre back to its natural habitat,” Phillips explained. “The first phase involved building nesting boxes for birds. The Audubon Society came out and gave a talk to the fifth graders, gave a bird walk and then donated the bird boxes and installation. The second phase involves restoring this area where the (Prudential Realty) volunteers are taking out the grass and preparing it for planting with drought-tolerant, California native species. The future third phase will be an ‘A through Z’ garden for kindergarten and first grade students.”

Realtors and staff members of the Sierra Oaks office raked, cut sod, tilled the soil and planted. They also repainted parking lines on the sidewalk entrance to the school.

“I spent the day removing weeds and grass to allow for the planned construction of a nature area on the site,” said Realtor Glenn Fantazia. “It was hard work – I have blisters along with

well as teachers and other school personnel to give something back to the community. It was a very worthwhile day and I hope the kids and neighbors enjoy the end product we helped jump-start."



Sod busters: (left to right) Prudential California realtors Glenn Fantazia and Doug Reynolds and Madeline Feickert, who is a student at Bancroft Elementary, worked hard to remove sod from the project area.
(Photo by Susan Laird)

"It's incredible how people are willing to help for a good cause even in a tough economical time like this," said Doug Reynolds, who is a part of a Future Leaders of Real Estate group and was assigned to run the Prudential project out of the Sierra Oaks office. "As far as the actual day, our branch manager Mark Paul and I kind of broke up the projects: I was in charge of all of the ground clearing, tilling and mulching. We had some others working the painting and more doing the barbequing for the volunteers."

Reynolds found the project simply by driving by it. He had recently moved into the neighborhood and saw that the school looked like it could use a hand. A call to the school principal started the ball rolling, and coordinating the Prudential volunteers with the on-going project quickly fell into place.

The Bancroft School Project is also receiving some support from a grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, through the Schoolyard Habitat Program (SYH). The program connects kids with nature by helping teachers and students create native wildlife habitat on their school grounds. Through the Program, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service can provide technical support and guidance to educators, administrators, students, and community members who wish to create an effective, sustainable outdoor classroom and wildlife habitat on their school grounds, according to Karleen Vollherbst, who is with the program.

"SYH projects give every student a chance to observe, learn from, and experience nature and enhance their connection to the outdoors," Vollherbst said. "Teachers use SYH projects to provide learning experiences that align with Federal and state education goals, and as an integrating context for improving skills in core curriculum subjects such as science, math, reading and language arts. Schoolyard habitat projects provide an opportunity to bring all age groups together to work on project implementation and maintenance. They are a beautiful place not only for the school, but also for friends and neighbors."

Despite a few aching muscles, the Prudential volunteers said they received as great a gift as the one they gave to the school.

"I couldn't believe how quickly everyone wanted to get started," Reynolds said. "Each volunteer was so open to helping with wherever it was needed. Just being around everyone working together for such a great cause was an infectious environment. Everybody was looking out for each other; telling jokes and stories to pass the time. Whenever a hurdle would arise we would all work together to find the best solution. During the day I was mostly focused on getting as much work done as possible but once we finally wrapped up, I took a step back to see what had been done I could not believe the impact we were able to make in such a short amount of time. The natural habitat preserve area is ready for its next phase of the project. The front of the school had a complete transformation by painting the curbs. It felt amazing to realize that you were a small part in such a huge change for a great cause."

"We would never have gotten this far, this fast," Phillips said of the volunteers and their help. "This is phenomenal. We are so excited to get this much done."

"It was a very large project to take on over the past two months," Reynolds said. "But the feeling of giving will be with me for a much longer time."

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admin	8 April 2010	Inside Our Newspapers	Audubon Society, Ed Kratchow, Giving Day, Hubert H. Bancroft Elementary School, Prudential California Realty, Prudential Realty, REALTORS, Sierra Oaks
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